1.   A method of operating a service over a computer network comprising transactions in which customers purchase products and services from vendors in return for payment, wherein a customer and a vendor negotiate during a contract formation phase of a transaction and in which a product or service is

5   supplied to the customer during a contract execution phase of the transaction, there being an customer interface between the customer and the network to enable messages transmitted on the network according to a network protocol to be utilised by the customer, and to enable messages originating from the customer to be transmitted onto the network according to the network protocol,

10   and an vendor interface between the vendor and the network to enable messages transmitted on the network according to a network protocol to be utilised by the vendor and to enable messages originating from the vendor to be transmitted onto the network according to the network protocol, and wherein the method includes differentiating messages relating to contract formation and

15   contract execution phases of the transaction, messages relating to the contract formation phase of the transaction being enabled for transmission onto the network or for utilisation by the customer or vendor by a first sub-interface of the respective customer or vendor interface, and messages relating to the contract execution phase of the transaction being enabled for transmission onto

20   the network or for utilisation by the customer or vendor by a second sub-interface of the respective customer or vendor interface.

2.   A method according to claim 1 wherein an additional service provider is involved in the transaction during the contract negotiation phase of the

25   transaction only and plays no part in the contract execution phase of the transaction, there being an interface between the additional service provider and the network, the method including implementing a first sub-interface functionality only to enable network messages relating only to the contract formation phase of the transaction to be utilised by the additional service

provider or where created by the additional service provider, to enable these messages to be transmitted onto the network according to the network protocol.

3.   A method according to claim 1 wherein an additional service provider is
5   involved in the transaction during the contract execution phase of the transaction only and plays no part in the contract formation phase of the transaction, there being an interface between the additional service provider and the network, the method including implementing a second sub-interface functionality only to enable network messages relating only to the contract
10   execution phase of the transaction to be utilised by the additional service provider or where created by the additional service provider, to enable these messages to be transmitted onto the network according to the network protocol.

4.   A method according to claim 1 wherein an additional service provider
15   which is involved in the transaction during the contract negotiation phase of the transaction and the contract execution phase of the transaction, there being an interface between the additional service provider and the network, the method including implementing first and second sub-interface functionality to enable network messages relating to the contract formation and execution phases of
20   the transaction to be utilised by the additional service provider or where created by the additional service provider, to enable these messages to be transmitted onto the network according to the network protocol.

5.   An architecture for an service which operates over a computer network
25   which has an customer and an vendor which negotiate during a contract formation phase of a transaction and in which a product or service is supplied to the customer during a contract execution phase of the transaction, there being an customer interface between the customer and the network to enable messages transmitted on the network according to a network protocol to be

utilised by the customer and to enable messages originating from the customer to be transmitted onto the network according to the network protocol, and an vendor interface between the vendor and the network to enable messages transmitted on the network according to a network protocol to be utilised by the

5 vendor and to enable messages originating from the vendor to be transmitted onto the network according to the network protocol, and wherein each of the customer and vendor interfaces has a first and second sub-interface, the first sub-interface enabling messages relating to the contract formation phase of a transaction to be transmitted onto the network and utilised by the respective

10 customer or vendor and the second sub-interface enabling messages relating to the contract execution phase of a transaction to be transmitted onto the network and utilised by the respective customer or vendor.

6.   A method according to claim 5 wherein the architecture include at least

15 one additional service provider involved in the transaction during one of the contract negotiation phase and the contract execution phase of the transaction only but which plays no part respectively in the contract execution phase or contract negotiation phase of the transaction.

20 7.   An architecture according to claim 6 wherein the additional service provider includes a network enabled device which has an interface capable of implementing a first or a second sub-interface functionality only to enable network messages relating only to the relevant phase of the transaction with which the additional service provider is involved to be utilised by the additional

25 service provider or where originating from the additional service provider, to enable these messages to be transmitted onto the network according to the network protocol.

8.   An architecture according to claim 5 wherein the architecture includes a quality-of-service-guardian which has an interface capable of implementing first and second sub-interface functionality to enable network messages relating to the contract formation phase of the transaction between the customer and

5   vendor to be monitored and to enable network messages relating to the contract execution phase of the transaction to be monitored, the quality-of-service guardian being enabled to check whether the contract is executed according to terms of the contract.

10   9.   An architecture according to claim 8 wherein in the service, during the contract formation phase of the transaction, the customer and vendor negotiate contract terms, the quality-of-service guardian monitoring network messages concerned with such negotiation, and being enabled to act as an arbitrator in the event that any party to the transaction is in breach or is alleged by another party

15   to be in breach of the negotiated terms.

10.   An interface for a service which operates over a computer network and which has an customer and an vendor which negotiate during a contract formation phase of a transaction and in which a product or service is supplied

20   to the customer during a contract execution phase of the transaction, the interface being either an customer interface between the customer and the network to enable messages transmitted on the network according to a network protocol to be utilised by the customer and to enable messages originating from the customer to be transmitted onto the network according to the network

25   protocol, or an vendor interface between the vendor and the network to enable messages transmitted on the network according to a network protocol to be utilised by the vendor and to enable messages originating from the vendor to be transmitted onto the network according to the network protocol, and wherein the interface has first and second sub-interfaces, the first sub-interface enabling

messages relating to the contract formation phase of a transaction to be transmitted onto the network and utilised by the respective customer or buyer and the second sub-interface enabling messages relating to the contract execution phase of a transaction to be transmitted onto the network and utilised

5 by the respective customer or buyer.

11. An interface according to claim 10 wherein the interface includes an IDL compiler and an IDL interpreter provided as a hardware and/or software item for a respective customer's or vendor's network enabled device.

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12. A network protocol for a service which operates over a computer network which has an customer and an vendor which negotiate during a contract formation phase of a transaction and in which a product or service is supplied to the customer during a contract execution phase of the transaction,

15 the network protocol differentiating messages relating to contract formation and contract execution phases of the transaction and enabling messages relating to the contract formation phase of the transaction transmitted onto the network by the customer or vendor to be differentiated by an interface of and utilised by the respective vendor or customer.

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